

## Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

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DCS Communications Office

**September 17, 2004**

### **This Week In Central Office**

#### Monday, September 13

The Commissioner attended an EPSDT Steering Committee Meeting and a Children's Cabinet meeting at the state Capitol.

#### Thursday, September 16

The Commissioner met with Governor Bredesen.

### **The Week Ahead**

#### Tuesday, September 21

Commissioner Miller will attend the CSA Board Meeting in Morristown.

## **CORE Leadership**

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*\*The following are minutes from the CORE Leadership Meeting that occurred on September 14, 2004.*

- Commissioner Miller opened the meeting with the following announcements:
  - TennCare will now pay the \$2 million for the Level 4 facility in Memphis that were formerly being drawn directly out of state funds.
  - We need to get the Memphis situation worked out so that we are no longer being penalized federal dollars for the lack of reasonable efforts language in the initial Court orders for children in custody.
  - She has been holding a death grip on three final positions in Central Office and has decided to give one of those positions to Beth Kasch to oversee the Community Services Agencies based upon the recent audit findings. She reiterated that the findings in the audit were not the direct fault of the CSAs because we have not monitored consistently and communicated our expectations clearly.
  - CORE leadership also needs to evaluate the administrative needs of individual programs to determine where we can use administrative personnel appropriately and should be practicing "management by walking around." On a recent trip through the office, Commissioner found an employee asleep at her desk. Tom Riche will be the point person in assigning the support staff appropriately between divisions. By doing this, we will be able to keep all employees busy.
  - Commissioner will be holding three Regional trainings for supervisors on the topic of "Leadership in Child Welfare." Those trainings will take place in:
    - October 12, in Lexington for Shelby, Southwest, Northwest and South Central.
    - October 14, in Knoxville for Hamilton, Know, East and Northeast.
    - October 25, in Murfreesboro for Southeast, Davidson, Mid Cumberland, and Upper Cumberland.

- Commissioner will ask Northwest and Southwest each to give up a vacancy for transfer to Upper Cumberland.
  - Commissioner wants to make sure that all RAs are meeting monthly supervisors and looking at cleaning up all CPS issues. We need to begin to move away from the clean up and move toward getting procedures in place to move forward. Every supervisor in the agency should have, at minimum, a monthly meeting with their staff to share information and discuss procedural issues.
  - Commissioner feels it would be of great benefit to have all DCS attorneys attend pre-service training.
  - Commissioner distributed a handout called “breaking the Cycle of Inertia,” which was a handout from the Juvenile Judges Conference. All Core Leadership needs to look at the document and determine what is within the preview of their programs.
  - Protection and Prevention folks need to be thinking about how to do the CPS piece very well.
  - There was an audit finding around the trust funds of the children in care. We need to look at changing the rule that prevents the state from offsetting the cost of care by using monies coming in for kids in care. If we had a system of using a spend down from SSI or child support before going into the IVE, we would be preventing many issues that we are currently having in asking for retroactive reimbursement. The trip to a balanced budget is much easier when we increase revenue than when we try to cut expenditures. We currently have \$15 million in trust funds and this money should be able to be used for the care of these children.
- Mary Beth Franklyn will check with Judy Cole and Faye Harris about using the TICMAS system to verify social security numbers and prevent the problems with divergent information in the TNKIDS ACCENT systems.
  - Ken Sanders has stated that cell phones have consistently been a problem for rural regions. The best coverage in the state is offered by Verizon, the company DCS uses. However, the problem is that the coverage areas are determined by the location of the towers. Therefore, the farther away from the interstate you travel, the less likely you are to get a signal. He stated that the larger cell phone companies can contract with smaller companies for the use of cell towers and they will be happy to do so for us if these companies are identified.
    - The use of text pagers was discussed as a viable back-up option. However, Commissioner Miller expressed a desire to arm staff with cell phones wherever possible and stated the need for a work group to be organized to study the issue.
  - We really need to look at the viability of having a physical presence in every county in the state. This presence is vital to the work we do. In spreading out the staff in this manner, we would be able to show that we are following up on suggestions from the community forums. Judy Cole will talk with the RAs about next steps regarding this issue.
  - John Sparks, Doug Swisher and Joe Cimino brought information forward concerning the collapsed rates for foster care and adoption assistance. Formerly, the Department had 71 different rates for adoption assistance and now has eight. Similarly, the number of rates for foster care reimbursement has been reduced from 396 to eight.

## Summertime Slim Down Update – Blue Ribbon Committee

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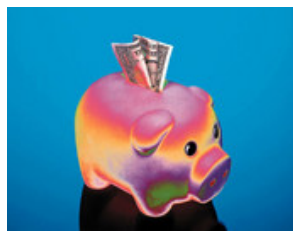
Employee question: Can the notice of action required for initial or changes in levels of care 2/3 or 4 be automated and made part of the permanency plan?

Answer: A meeting with program staff and IS was held Wednesday to review what it would take to make this happen. We are in the process of determining the feasibility and setting priorities. The IS team is currently at work on the business rules. Look for more details in a future issue...

## Money Matters

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*Submitted by Ken Sanders, Executive Director of Program Support*



A penny saved is a penny earned....right? Not so according to Joe Cimino, our DCS Budget Director. For every dollar saved (DCS expenditures, in our adaptation of this old saying) we only earn revenue \$.30 to \$.40 in federal revenues. This is really an awful track record for us, and we can do better.

This is why I want to discuss some important money matters that are impacting our department right now. Everyone at DCS needs to realize that it is essential for us to increase our federal revenue. A lot is on the line right here, right now. The level of genuine commitment we demonstrate in this new fiscal year that began July 1, 2004, will determine the success of our efforts. Let's talk about why we have a revenue problem.

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is funded by a combination of state and federal dollars. The majority of our state dollars are used as a match for federal revenues. In simple terms, the federal government pays back a percentage of the state dollars spent for a variety of allowable program and/or service expenses.

Last fiscal year, DCS had a \$31 million revenue shortfall. The *main* reasons were instances of either "no documentation" or "inadequate documentation" in our files. As a result, DCS was forced to spend more of the state dollars when the federal dollars were disallowed. This hurts all of us because expenditure reductions are necessary to balance our budget whenever federal dollars are lost.

No government job is ever finished until all the paper work is completed. I have been in public service roles for 33 years and have yet to have a position where the "paper work" wasn't an essential part of my job responsibilities. The auditors always look at the required orders, forms, waivers, reports and other documentation to determine the accuracy of the total funds provided to an agency. When they find a big blunder, it inspires them to go deeper. It is essential for all of us to do our part to ensure the accuracy and completeness in all of our required documentation. This is one of the basic elements in maximizing the amount of federal revenue that DCS will have to provide services.

In a nutshell, the children and families of Tennessee deserve their fair share of the federal dollars made available from applicable federal programs. If we don't commit ourselves to doing the best we can to obtain Tennessee's fair share then we are not acting in the best interest of our kids. I have no doubt that all of us on the DCS team really want to do what is best for them. Increased funding will allow for us to improve the level of services and to achieve positive outcomes for our children and families. How can that not be important to us?

Another very important aspect of our ability to receive federal revenue involves something called Random Moment Sampling (RMS). This is a method that the government allows as an alternative to recording every bit of time we spend on all of our workday activities (thank goodness for that!). Through RMS, a computer-generated list of employee names is randomly drawn. These employees are then contacted to determine exactly what they are working on at that very moment.

Case managers are most likely to be doing casework...right? Not according to our current RMS data, which indicates that our case managers spend only 40 percent of their time on casework. We all know that can't be right and it one of the lowest rates in the United States.

A typical work day for a case manager could include phone calls, visits, completing case records and other required documentation, as well as a variety of other case work related tasks. Over a period of time at DCS, there seems to have developed a false assumption that if they are not out having direct contact with a child or family the work should be classified as "administrative time" on the RMS responses. This is not correct in most instances.

We will soon announce new RMS training. This training should result in collecting more accurate RMS data. More accurate RMS data will produce a better overall profile of our case manager efforts. This in turn will improve our ability to draw down additional federal revenue. I have no doubt that this problem will improve upon the completion of the new RMS training.

One final thing that is being implemented is a regular conference call with DCS Regional Administrators, Community Services Agencies, and staff from the Office of Finance and Program Support. The purpose of these conference calls will be to share information and to resolve problems as quickly as possible. The first conference call is scheduled for Monday, September 20 at 2:30 p.m., CT.

DCS has truly accomplished a lot during the past several months. I applaud all of the DCS employees, the CSAs, and our vendors for staying focused during this period of change. Everyone is a vital part in making a difference. We are all on the same team. We make a difference because we care.

## **Limited English Proficiency**

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The face of Tennessee's population is changing. Our state has always celebrated a heritage of diverse cultures. Historically, that diversity was largely the result of the regional differences of the state. The population also included two primary ethnic groups, Caucasian and African American. In recent years however, many people of different national origins have migrated to the state. In the official census for the year 2000, the population of Nashville for example, included more than 26,000 Hispanics and more than 13,000 Asians. Overall, almost 5 percent of Nashville's population was something other than white or African American. The population makeup for Memphis and Shelby County was similar, with 4.5 percent other than white or African American. While the percentages were not as high in other areas of the state, every DCS region had at least 5,000 Hispanics and 1,000 Asians. In the Upper Cumberland region Hispanics outnumber African Americans by an almost 2-to-1 ratio.

With these emerging populations the Department of Children's Services can expect new challenges. As the state's population becomes more diverse, so too will our customers. The department cannot allow cultural and language barriers to impede our progress toward becoming a world class human services organization. In August, as a response to the Brian A. lawsuit, the department's Path to Excellence Implementation Plan was filed with the federal court. A major component of the plan is the establishment of a standing (permanent) committee on Multi-Cultural Affairs. The committee is charged with developing a plan to improve the cultural competence of the department. The committee will oversee the development of a cultural competence training curriculum to be integrated with pre- and in-service training for all employees.

Another key area the department must address more aggressively is the provision of services to persons who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Perhaps you have heard someone say, “if they are going to be here, they should learn to speak the language.” Federal law dictates that any agency receiving any federal funds must ensure that all persons have equal access to benefits. The onus to be able to communicate the need for services falls to the service provider, not the recipient. Not only is it imperative that the department provides interpreters, it is also necessary to have all appropriate documents translated.

Currently, there is a statewide contract with Open Communications International to provide over the phone interpretation. There are also services available through the Tennessee Foreign Language Institute. Region by region interpretation and translation services are being accessed in a variety of ways. Please share some of your successes and resources so that a comprehensive directory of available services can be developed. We would also like to know of all of the bilingual staff within the department. Any information you can share about how we can better communicate with our customers is appreciated. E-mail information to Arlene Martin-Norman in the Division for Diversity Initiatives (formerly the Civil Rights Division).

### **Please Send Us Your October Events!**

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When submitting your **October** events for posting on the Internet calendar, please remember to include the following information:

- ✓ County and region
- ✓ Name and phone number of MAIN contact person
- ✓ Time, Date, Location and Purpose of event

Please send your events to [Rick.H.Mullins@state.tn.us](mailto:Rick.H.Mullins@state.tn.us)

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

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*“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”*  
*Anne Frank*

At DCS, the waiting is over! Throughout her career, Commissioner Miller has been single-minded in her quest for improvement, and DCS has provided a fertile field for her many talents. Over the past eight months, change has been fast and furious—and has yielded significant improvements in our organization.

But the Commissioner is also keenly aware that she cannot do this work alone. For improvement to be meaningful, it must be continuous. And continuous improvement is the work of a community—not of an individual, which is why members of the DCS community gathered together at Fall Creek Falls on August 30 and 31 for one of several forums that will be held over the next few months to kick off Continuous Quality Improvement efforts statewide. Regional Administrators, team coordinators, team leaders, and case managers from all 12 regions participated in the forum that was facilitated by the Central Office QA/CQI Team in collaboration with Jenifer (“Jen”) Agosti, a child welfare consultant with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. Commissioner Miller, Deputy Commissioner Tom Riche, Blue Ribbon Team Member Brenda Bell, Executive Directors Judy Cole and Paul Montebello, and other key members of the central office management team also participated in the event and worked with regional groups as they brainstormed solutions to regional issues.

The group was dynamic, enthusiastic and committed, and each participant left the forum excited about implementing and supporting Continuous Quality Improvement efforts in his or her region.

**“What is continuous quality improvement?”** The Commissioner asked the forum participants this question. The following are some of their responses.

- *“Working together toward a common goal, pulling in the same direction at the same time toward improving our agency, and thus the outcomes for children and families.”*
- *“Moving toward the highest level of best practice within the state for better outcomes for children and families. Not only do we continue to improve, but we continue even when we believe we have reached a high level. We keep striving for better outcomes for our stakeholders.”*
- *“A process that empowers people at all levels of an organization to take on a personal responsibility for the decision making and success of the organization’s mission.”*
- *“Improvement in the way we do our jobs through empowering staff to make decisions and solve problems at a local level.”*

**“What are the implications of CQI for DCS?”** The Commissioner followed up with this question. Again, these responses are in the participants’ own words.

- *“Better outcomes for children and families.”*
- *“More effective services for families to enable them to remain together.”*
- *“Families and DCS working together to achieve better outcomes through a continued process of improvement so that, when we are done with our working and professional relationship, we are all the better for it.”*
- *“A sense of pride in doing a great job for children and families in Tennessee.”*

In essence, continuous quality improvement is:

- having an improvement goal that you are striving toward;
- understanding how far away you are from that goal; and
- taking small but continuous steps towards your goal.

Continuous quality improvement demands that we have a willingness to change, the power to problem-solve, ready and immediate access to the data and tools we need to facilitate change and problem-solving, and an ability to reflect critically on our own behavior to identify the ways in which we inadvertently contribute to DCS’s problems and change the way we act. If we are successful in this, the benefits to children, to families, to DCS employees and partners, and to all other stakeholders will be tangible and measurable. We will, as one participant so aptly put it, all be the “better for it.”

If you missed the regional kick-off, don’t worry—more CQI forums are being planned. Dates and other details will be provided in this column, which will be a regular feature of the Commissioner’s Weekly Wrap Up.

**If you have news of improvements—no matter how small—or questions about CQI, send an email to Daryl Chansuthus so that your news can be shared with the DCS community. Use this column to celebrate your successes, share your lessons learned, and discuss your next steps. This column belongs to you. Please use it to spread the word about the great things that are happening in your regions, counties, and teams!**



### Lessons in Child Welfare to Ponder in Good Times and Bad

- ★ **Treat the child welfare system as your “emergency room” of human services.** Ensure it has the resources necessary to competently respond to the safety needs of children.
- ★ **Recognize that caseworkers drive the cost of the system.** Support them so they can succeed. No one is more important to a successful child welfare system than a competent, adequately resourced workforce.
- ★ **Focus on performance.** Expect positive outcomes and shape ongoing discussions and planning on the need to achieve improved outcomes.
- ★ **Insist on quality.** Build systems that achieve accreditation. Nothing builds a better infrastructure for success as does accreditation.
- ★ **Partnerships are critical.** Build strong partnerships with the courts, private and public sector, advocates, foster parents, school and communities and all those who care about children. It is hard work. It must be done in the best of times if these partnerships are to be there in the worst of times.
- ★ **Focus on safety.** The number one responsibility of the child welfare system is to ensure that all children under its responsibility are safe. This is everyone’s responsibility.

*Excerpted from “Lessons Learned from the Illinois Child Welfare System Turnaround,” Comments by Jess McDonald, co-director of Fostering Results and former director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1994-2003.*

### Andrea Walks for Tennessee’s Children



Have you walked with First Lady Andrea Conte? If so, we want to know about it! Please e-mail Andrea Turner with details.

[www.active.com/event\\_detail.cfm?event\\_id=1149520](http://www.active.com/event_detail.cfm?event_id=1149520)



*If you haven't got time to do it right the first time, when will you have time to do it over?*

- Author unknown

*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.*

- Sir Winston Churchill

*It is far more impressive when others discover your good qualities without your help.*

- Judith Martin